



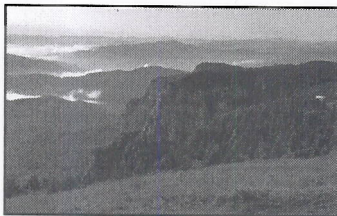
Summary

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A macro-regional strategy for the Carpathian Region?

Summary by Maria Isabel Moran Vidal posted on 29 January 2014



Macro-regional strategies: a valuable and cheap tool

The European Commission defines a macro-region as "an area including territory from a number of different countries or regions associated with one or more common features or challenges". Macro-regional strategies may only be developed if the benefit of facing those common problems is significant and visible, through the implementation of clear and concrete actions.

The Carpathian Area

The Carpathian area is a mountainous area covering 190.000km² and one of the poorest and underdeveloped parts of Europe. It includes territory spread across 5 Member States (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania and Slovakia) and 2 neighbouring states (Serbia and Ukraine). The establishment of a solid cooperation and coordination framework within the Carpathian region is a key objective of such existing initiatives as the Carpathian Convention and the Carpathian Euroregion.

Following the successful example of the "Alpine Space", and moves towards an EU Alpine macro-regional strategy, Carpathian stakeholders intend to transform this transnational area in order to overcome its peripherality and work towards incorporating a potential macro-regional strategy into the Cohesion policy for the period 2014-2020.

The European Parliament debated the issue in October 2013 for the first time.

Would the Carpathian Region benefit from an EU macro-regional strategy?

In December 2013, Polish MEP Tomasz Poręba (ECR) organised a Conference entitled: "Why the Carpathian Region needs an EU macro-regional strategy?". According to him, despite the fact that the Carpathian area fulfills the criteria for macro-regional strategies, until now, the region has not been included in any multilateral form of cooperation within the EU. One of the reasons is that the EU Strategy for the Danube Region already explicitly covers the Carpathian Region and many actions are foreseen for this area. However, a macro-regional strategy would be an ideal tool to make up for the delays on meeting many of the main needs of the Carpathians.

Polish MEP Danuta Hübner (EPP), Chair of the Committee on Regional Development, greeted the initiative and stressed the fact that many territorial, bilateral and cross-border projects are already running in the Carpathians. She added that all of the existing initiatives on this field had been a bottom-up process. Finally, she encouraged stakeholders to check the Cohesion Policy regulatory Framework 2014-2020, as macro-regional strategies were included in the common framework in the Partnership Agreements .

Vicente Rodríguez Saez, from DG REGIO, advised that one key point, when doing an assessment of a macro-regional strategy, is to focus on the added value, noting that the Commission will also assess positively long-lasting political commitment and administrative support. Macro-regional strategies are flexible enough, also geographically, for this project to potentially find a place in strategies already in place, as the Danube strategy.

László Borbély, Chairman of the Foreign Policy Committee of the Romanian Chamber of Deputies, agreed with DG REGIO's position. He stressed the fact that the Danube strategy had been the result of a long lasting lobbying effort and it would not be realistic to institutionalize a Carpathian strategy already for the 2014-2020 period. In his opinion, the next important steps are to reach a better coordination and administrative capacity, to take advantage of other existing territorial tools and to explain to governments and EU institutions how important this strategy is and how to put it together with the Danube strategy. Romania would play a key role on this strategy; this country includes 40% of the Carpathian area. At the same time, for Romania, the Danube and the Black Sea Strategies are also major priorities.

Lithuanian Presidency representative Tomas Gulbinas, focused on the growing interest in macro-regional strategies, as they are proving their added value as stated by the Council last October. But he warned about the challenges arose on their administration and implementation due to the "Three No's" rule introduced by the Commission (No new financial resources, No new institutions and No new regulations).

The Council will decide

The Commission cannot itself speed up the submission of proposals for further macro-regional strategies. It can be a facilitator and may also coordinate these strategies; but only those launched on the request from the Council, which implies that they are fully supported by all Member States. Will this initiative get enough support in the near future?

Further information:

European Union's macro-regional strategies / Keysource by Sorina Ionescu, July 2013

EU macro-regional strategies: state of play / Briefing by Ivana Katsarova, February 2012

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